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Retrospective Study of Basic Education and Skills Training (BEST) USAID Assistance to Sector Reform in Zimbabwe

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Contents

Acronyms

BEST	Basic Education and Skills Training program
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CIP	Commodity Import Program
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
GOZ	Government of Zimbabwe
HRRC	Human Resources Research Center
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NUST	National University of Science and Technology
OPEX	Operational experts
PAAD	Program assistance approval document
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZASA	Zimbabwe Agriculture Sector Assistance
ZIMMAN	Zimbabwe Manpower Development program
ZIMSCI	Zimbabwe Science Education program
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe School Examinations Council
ZIMTEC	Zimbabwe Teacher Education Technology program

Overview

Introduction

In fiscal year 1983, USAID/Zimbabwe began the Basic Education and Skills Training program (BEST), one of the first attempts to provide nonproject assistance (NPA) on a significant scale to the education sector. Lessons learned from this early experience shaped other NPA education initiatives in Africa over the next decade.

Modeled on the Zimbabwe Agriculture Sector Assistance (ZASA) program, the education-sector assistance strategy combined policy-conditioned program support and targeted technical assistance. It also used local currency generated by a Commodity Import Program (CIP) of $50 million in fiscal year 1982 and a CIP of $37 million in FY 1983. Training under BEST was closely coordinated with the Zimbabwe Manpower Development program (ZIMMAN), also authorized in 1983, and with the ZASA training for the faculty of agriculture at the University of Zimbabwe. USAID used the same contractor to manage long-term external training under ZASA, BEST, and ZIMMAN.

BEST activities continued through January 1990. Though the evaluations were generally positive in terms of performance and impact, BEST was not continued. This was due in part to an expected phase-down of the bilateral program in Zimbabwe and to other factors that necessitated a narrower focus of the bilateral-assistance strategy. The BEST program implementation and task orders are summarized in the final report (Academy for Educational Development, 1990, PD-ABC-116), and the results and impacts are reviewed in the final evaluation (Creative Associates, November 1990, PD-ABC-223).

In January 1997, Frank Method and David Evans, both experienced former USAID education officers, were asked to return to Zimbabwe to review the current state of education and skills training in Zimbabwe; to discuss BEST's long-term impact on institutional capacities and policies with key people in the country; and to explore what, if anything, can be learned from this experience with regard to sector-reform strategies and modalities of assistance.

Study Process and Limitations

Evans and Method spent a week in Zimbabwe in January, following a desk study of available documentation on the program and Evans' visit to the International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) in Paris to review documentation and obtain recommendations on potential contacts. Golden Chekenyere, who had been the USAID foreign service national program specialist for BEST shortly after it began through the phase-down in 1990, joined them.

Due to the short time available in Zimbabwe (because of unavoidable problems with authorizations for the evaluation), most of the information gathered was from Government of Zimbabwe documents and interviews with key people. No independent data gathering or field investigation was possible. The team did not have access to USAID files or documentation. The

USAID mission in Harare was fully occupied with strategic planning and was not able to meet with the team. These limitations were offset to some extent by the fact that Method and Chekenyere had substantial familiarity with the initial analysis, design, and implementation of BEST as well as ZIMMAN. Evans had some familiarity with the Zimbabwe context because of his recent service with USAID/South Africa, and Chekenyere was able to facilitate most interviews on very short notice.

In any case, the purpose was not to review the technical quality of activities under BEST, the adequacy of management and logistic systems used in its implementation, or the performance of contractors. Rather, it was to review the overall pattern of assistance and strategic decisions made by Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) officials, looking for impacts that have lasted beyond the period of USAID assistance, and for lessons that may be useful for USAID, other donors, and countries.

The activities under review began some 15 years ago, and the assistance for these activities ended seven years ago. Neither USAID nor Zimbabwe will ever be in quite the same situation that influenced decisions in 1983. Nevertheless, the basic question guiding this study is whether under similar circumstances it would be advisable to follow a similar course of action. The implicit questions (which others will need to answer) are: Could and would such a course of action be supported today by the donor community? Is it likely that a country today, faced with similar circumstances as those of the newly independent Zimbabwe, would be able to operate with a similar level, length, and modality of assistance? In an attempt to answer such questions, the team identified the critical aspects of the overall assistance effort and determined what strategic decisions had been made to allow these paths to be followed.

BEST Description and Authorization

USAID/Zimbabwe developed the BEST program during FY 1983, and USAID/Washington approved it in June 1983. This gestation of less than nine months was unusually fast, reflecting both the high priority given to responding to events in newly independent Zimbabwe and the sector program modality chosen for BEST, which obviated the need for detailed project planning prior to program approval. The summary description from the authorizing memorandum reads:

> The goal of the Basic Education and Skills Training Sector Assistance Program (BEST) is to contribute to Zimbabwe's economic and social development by providing additional budgetary resources to assist the GOZ to implement its planned program to expand its educational and employment skills training system with special emphasis on improving cost-effectiveness and equity within the overall system. The program's resources will be utilized to support those items and activities which are expected to contribute to the reduction of the key constraints inhibiting the attainment of the government's objectives. These constraints are (1) limited financial resources, (2) insufficient numbers of trained teachers, (3) inappropriate instructional curriculum, (4) inefficient/inequitable spatial allocation of educational/training facilities, and (5) insufficient planning capacity. Under this BEST Program grant a total of US$45 million is expected to be obligated over a three-year period. Of each $15 million annual tranche, $12 million will be allocated to a Commodity Import Program, which will generate local currency for use by the GOZ in support of program objectives. The balance of $3 million in each tranche will be reserved for foreign exchange costs of U.S. technical assistance, training, and commodities needed to support program objectives.

The life of the grant was to be five years with funding of US$15 million in each of the first three years, beginning in FY 1983. Implementa-

tion would take place through three ministries, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Manpower Development and Planning and the Ministry of Construction. The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning, and Development coordinated the allocation of funding for specific projects. The respective ministries presented budget requests, which were in turn reviewed by an interministerial working group with USAID participation.

Summary of Study Findings

Four factors stand out as critical to BEST's overall success:

1. A unique policy context;
2. Program coordination within the Government of Zimbabwe;
3. Substantial and flexible program financing; and
4. Long-term training and staff development.

Also, the team identified four factors that they considered major limitations to further success:

1. Lack of long-term support for "soft-finance" activities;
2. Erosion of climate for innovation as Zimbabwe developed a progressively more prudent planning and management approach;
3. Slower than expected economic growth and job creation; and
4. Lack of follow-on assistance for external linkages.

Several aspects of the Zimbabwe experience differ from the general trends in assistance policy and from the strategic advice given most countries for sustainable sector reform:

- Basic education expansion necessitated reforms at secondary and tertiary levels.
- Bricks and mortar, commodities, and equipment were major components of assistance.
- Not building schools and reducing subsidies helped Zimbabwe increase access to education.
- Sustainability was not a priority criterion in the initial planning, yet it was achieved.

As an addendum to the study, since it is somewhat outside the scope, the authors comment on some aspects that merit consideration for further funding, if not by USAID, then by other entities.

Development Context

Development Context in Zimbabwe, 1983

In 1983 Zimbabwe had only been independent for three years. It was still in the process of setting policies, staffing its new ministries, restructuring government, and resolving bitter political differences that remained from its struggle for independence, as well as still resettling refugees and ex-combatants.

In 1981 the overall gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was about US$775, with the majority black population income at about half of this figure. The economy was sharply dualistic; whites and foreign investors dominated the modern sector and accounted for some 96 percent of the GDP. Of the approximately one million black African wage-earners in 1981, about 40 percent were employed in low-paying agriculture and domestic-service jobs; 40 percent in mining, manufacturing, and services; and another 16 percent in public services. The exchange rate in February 1983 was Z$1.03 to US$1. In January 1997 it was Z$10.5 to US$1.

Though it was still recovering from war damages and the effects of economic embargoes, Zimbabwe had both substantial agricultural surpluses and a sophisticated and diverse formal economy that was underutilized due in part to foreign exchange constraints. The government was a minor player in the economy, with the important exception of price controls, currency regulations, and other restrictions on imports and repatriation still in place from the sanctions. The new government was taking steps to improve income redistribution, such as setting minimum and maximum wage rates, but was not yet nationalizing or otherwise participating directly in the economy (though some political leaders of

the new Zimbabwe were advocating socialist policies including direct ownership).

The economic outlook beyond 1983 was problematic. The sharp increases in GDP and per capita income of 1980 and 1981 were beginning to level off to about the rates of population growth (3.5 percent); inflation was beginning to accelerate (17 percent and rising); a serious regional drought was in its second year and beginning to eliminate the agricultural surpluses; and a worldwide recession was reducing demand for Zimbabwe's mineral exports.

Government expenditures were increasing rapidly, as budget priorities shifted from defense to social programs, particularly education and health, and to agricultural and railway subsidies. Debt increases and international assistance initially financed these expenditures. In December 1982 the government announced a devaluation, restrictions on further borrowing, and significant reductions in consumer subsidies. The expectation reflected in BEST's Program Assistance Approval Document (PAAD) was that the next several years would be characterized by moderating inflation, growing unemployment, ongoing fiscal discipline, and a continued priority for social-sector expenditures, particularly education.

Development Context in Zimbabwe, Current Picture

Zimbabwe's economy in 1997 may be in the best shape since 1981. Given two years of good rains, Zimbabwe's agricultural-led economy has above-average agricultural output, good agricultural prices and exports, continued mining expansion, and strong consumer-led recovery in manufacturing distribution, resulting in 7 percent to 8 percent growth in real GDP. Despite recent gains, per capita income lags far behind 1981 levels, reflecting inflation and declining currency values as well as a 3.2 percent population growth.

In December 1995 Zimbabwe ended its first five-year Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). The ESAP began a fundamental reorientation of the economy from the state-dominated socialism of the country's first decade to a more open, market-based economy. The government made substantial progress in most areas of its ESAP program, including reducing the budget deficit, liberalizing the trade regime, eliminating most exchange controls, reducing civil service employment, cutting back the role of government in the economy, and easing price, wage, and labor regulations. A follow-on ESAP will require major reductions in the civil service, rationalizing recurrent spending, and radical restructuring or privatizing of parastatals.

In the 1980s the Zimbabwean government ran large budget deficits as a major element of its efforts to redistribute income to the majority of Zimbabweans who live outside the formal economy, primarily through sharp spending increases on health and education and in civil service hiring. Education (22 percent), defense (11.4 percent), health (9 percent), debt service (7 percent), and higher education (6 percent) are currently the largest categories of government spending. Although the government had planned to lower its budget deficits and debt-service ratio, the 1991 and 1994 droughts forced it to increase its foreign debt. Government budget deficits continue to be 10 percent to 12 percent of the GDP. As a result, inflation has averaged about 20 percent for the last several years, and interest rates hover in the 35 percent to 42 percent range, severely constraining investment. Moreover, highly leveraged companies have not been able to justify investments in new equipment and plant capacity.

Unemployment is the most significant of Zimbabwe's problems. The formal sector jobless rate is about 36 percent and is growing as the economy struggles to get back to the real output levels that were achieved before the droughts. New jobs created in the dynamic agriculture, tourism, and mining sectors are offset as the civil service is trimmed (50,000 retrenchments), businesses streamline workforces, and noncompetitive firms close.

About a quarter of a million school-leavers enter the labor market annually, and only about 10 percent find employment in the formal sectors of the economy. There is, however, an apparent shortage of skilled workers insofar as the industrial sector has expressed concern that not enough young Zimbabweans are receiving technical training to replace retiring workers or to meet the demand of new investment. Thus, there appears to be a serious mismatch between the output of the education system and the demands of the economy.

Though this is obviously of great concern, to educators as well as to employers and others, not much creative thinking seems to be going on about ways to improve the match. One faction argues for more technical training but judges that the conventional preservice approaches would be unaffordable if done at an increased scale, and in the end, probably would not provide what employers want. Others, including planners in the Ministry of Education, recognize that employers want workers with a good foundation of skills and work disciplines that they can train in their respective industries. Yet the choices (at least as expressed in interviews with the team) appear frozen between two conventional approaches, without much thought given to a third path. Better information is needed to determine what prospective employers actually want and how workers are expected to function in the changing economy. Employers need to think about how differently educated workers can help them compete in a changing economy.

A key to future growth in Zimbabwe—and to attracting additional investment—will be improved access to the South African market. South Africa remains Zimbabwe's most important trading partner, accounting for over 20 percent of total trade. Relations with South Africa, which despite rhetoric have had a pragmatic history, are now normalized. Nevertheless, after four years of on-again, off-again negotiations, the GOZ has not been able to get its southern neighbor to renew and extend the bilateral trade agreement that expired in 1992. Adoption of the Southern African Development Community trade protocol should significantly improve Zimbabwe's economic outlook.

Education Context

Education Context in Zimbabwe, 1983

Prior to independence, two systems of education existed in Zimbabwe. One system was designed to serve the European, Asian, and "colored" population; the second system was designed to serve the African population. These two systems were different in terms of quality, number of teachers, facilities, and instructional materials, with a clearly inferior system serving the African population. For example, all European children were guaranteed six years of primary school and four years of secondary education. By contrast, only about 35 percent of African children were enrolled in primary schools in 1980. Less than a third completed primary, and only 27 percent of those had access to secondary school—in total, about 2 percent of potential African students. Moreover, 12 times more resources were allocated to the European education "system" per primary student than to the African education "system." In 1980, 1.2 million children were enrolled in primary school, 75,000 students in secondary school, and only about 2,000 students at the University of Zimbabwe.

After independence, five different types of schools had grown out of the two systems. The government decided to concentrate on the community-school model as part of its strategy to redistribute resources and improve access for all.

- Community schools—privatized public schools that were located mainly in white suburbs.
- Group A schools—public schools operated on a zoning system, including those previ-

ously reserved for Europeans, Asians, and colored. Though these schools were "integrated," they continued to be restrictive due to the zoning "for residents only."

- Group B schools—government schools in the townships that, effectively, were for Africans only.
- Group C schools—government schools in communal lands, though in actuality there were few.
- Private schools—missions, farm schools, and town and rural council schools. These were often small and local but enrolled some 80 percent of all schoolchildren. Built with local funds and fee-based, they received government grants per student and per teacher. In effect, these were community schools built to spread opportunity. The other category of community schools resulted from a 1979 effort to make public schools private so as to maintain their exclusivity.

The first priorities for the government were to redress the lack of educational opportunities for African students, to reallocate resources geographically, and to equalize expenditures across the different categories of schools by putting all teachers on the same salary scale and allocating funds to all schools on a per-student-by-level-of-education basis. By 1983, Zimbabwe had a sense of the imperatives that would drive education expansion and improvement. These were based more on policy judgments of a political nature than on systematic analysis of costs and management implications, or other aspects of conventional education planning. In fact, Zimbabwe lacked most of the essential capacities for conventional education planning and did not have the time to conduct an analysis even if it were motivated to do so. The basic directions and imperatives were as follows:

- Continue to expand primary education as rapidly as possible with the goal of universal and free schooling for all children.
- Increase access to secondary school so that all primary leavers could continue three more years of education (for a total of nine years), with at least 70 percent moving to the secondary level by 1984.
- Maintain standards while also making education more relevant and less racially biased than in the previous regime.
- Expand skills training sufficiently to reabsorb ex-combatants, meet the needs of a resuscitating economy, and provide a tertiary focus for the expanding school system.
- Reinvigorate the University of Zimbabwe and other tertiary institutions.
- Meet the teacher supply and other staffing requirements of the above.

Though the ministry was able to set policy and act decisively, it lacked essential elements for education planning, needs assessment, and setting quantitative goals. The ministry's planning unit initially consisted of little more than one (fortunately, very responsible and capable) person, working with inherited staff from the previous regime and a few external consultants.

Among the major problems were the following:

- Enrollment data were lacking or seriously unreliable.
- Many schools did not exist (because they were destroyed or abandoned), and many that did exist were little more than temporary shelters, in some cases tents.
- Demographic estimates were little more than guesswork; no effective census had been taken in many areas for many years, and the population was still being resettled.
- Most schools had been budgeted and managed as autonomous entities, and there was little experience and no operational model for working with the schools as a system; for example, there was little agreement on the budgetary implications of changing salary scales as the separate systems were integrated and restructured.
- The country as a whole, including the educa-

tion system, was facing a loss of key staff; this included African educators who were being recruited by other sectors as well as Europeans who were opting to leave the country.

- Technical training priorities were difficult to set because of uncertain job creation and demand for skilled labor due to a war- and sanction-damaged economy. It was unknown which sectors would respond and at what rates. Further, since the journeyman trades required apprenticeships, the loss of journeymen from the economy slowed the acquisition of skills training for new apprentices.
- The government had yet to fully declare itself on major policy issues such as privatization and land reform, public-private roles in the provision of services, delegations to local councils and other entities, or make key ministry appointments and assign responsibilities, among other key decisions.
- Donors, on whom much of the implementation funding and execution would depend, had not yet declared themselves beyond general commitments.

USAID was able to help set a direction simply because it could move quickly and responsively. This was in part due to the fact that it already had substantial allocable local currency from the previous CIPs. The Agency's influence was not just in the size of the assistance commitment. In 1982, in the initial planning that led eventually to the agreements on BEST, USAID provided some timely and much-needed technical assistance (using discretionary funding from the previous CIP program).

First, it commissioned several studies and background papers that basically pulled together in accessible and understandable form historical and socioeconomic information, available data, and descriptive information on education in Zimbabwe. These papers, prepared by Francis Mazhero, appear to have led to a quantum improvement in the overall understanding of the issues among the various actors who had to make decisions in 1983, including key Zimbabwe educators who also lacked current and reliable information. They now had more than anecdote, opinion, and ideology with which to guide their search for workable options.

Second, the CEO/Planning had seen a demonstration of how to use computers to help manage education data. USAID responded to the request for help with database management by providing a consultant (Kurt Moses of the Academy for Educational Development) for several months to work with local staff to develop a relational database and spreadsheet model of the school system.

Though relatively crude by today's standards of systems modeling—basically a large spreadsheet with few graphics—this early effort helped make it possible for ministry decision-makers to estimate the cost implications of various policy and strategy options (e.g., how to allocate specialist teachers, how to handle school building, and how best to manage the transition from the primary to secondary level). It was suggested in the PAAD that this relatively modest effort in the preinvestment phase of assessment and planning may have had an impact on overall resource use, cost savings, and eventual outcome as large as the actual investment itself. Even in hindsight of 15 years, this appears to have been an extraordinarily cost-effective investment to the extent that this analysis and model development (and the associated coaching of the first set of ministry data-system managers) helped officials find ways to deal with a seemingly impossible set of choices. The statistical unit continues to be called the Computers and Statistics Unit. This experience suggests that analytic and assessment activities can have assistance value independent of the subsequent investments. In at least some cases USAID may wish to consider supporting such analytic activities even where further USAID investment is not contemplated.

Education Context in Zimbabwe, Current Impressions

Primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe are funded through a combination of government

expenditures and user fees. Although several types of private and government schools exist, with very different facilities, financing for the recurrent budgets for each type of school is similar. The government pays all teacher salaries and contributes a per-pupil grant to each school. Parents pay tuition fees at all secondary schools. Most primary and secondary schools are built privately or by communities. By contrast, most tertiary institutions—university, teacher, and technical colleges—are built with government and donor funds. Tertiary students receive half the cost of education in the form of a grant and are given a low-interest loan for the other half. These policies for financing education have remained largely unchanged over the decade, except for some increases in tuition and other fees.

When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, 1.2 million children were enrolled in primary school. Primary school enrollments rose to 2.28 million children by 1990, and to 2.5 million students in 1996, an overall increase of 208 percent. The number of primary schools increased from 3,161 in 1980 to 4,659 in 1996, while the number of primary schoolteachers increased from 28,455 in 1980 to 64,571 in 1996. The increase in the number of primary teachers reduced the average pupil-teacher ratio from 1:43.4 in 1980 to 1:38.7 in 1996.

The team did not see disaggregated data by gender on the enrollment and completion patterns. It was informed that there is almost an equal participation rate for girls in primary schools, with girls a small majority of those completing (reportedly 52 percent). The participation of girls in secondary education is about 42 percent, which has remained constant over the decade. At the secondary level about 36 percent of the leavers are female (if true, this indicates that the problem of female enrollment is largely due to either dropping out or not enrolling at this level); and the percentage of enrollment at the tertiary level is about the same, 26 percent to 31 percent typically.

The secondary level experienced even more dramatic increases in enrollments. In 1980 only 74,321 students were enrolled in secondary school, but by 1996 secondary school enrollments rose to 760,576, more than a tenfold increase. Over the same period, the number of secondary school teachers increased from 3,730 in 1980 to 27,983 in 1996. The rapid rise in secondary school enrollments and secondary school teachers is nothing short of phenomenal and represents one of the most significant achievements of the Government of Zimbabwe since its independence. The achievement is even more astounding given the magnitude of school construction necessary, and given that most of the increase (85 percent) occurred before 1990.

Although data were not readily available on Zimbabwe's public and private tertiary education system,[1] it is quite evident that higher education enrollments have increased dramatically. Many of the institutions of higher education did not exist before independence, and some of the institutions, such as the University of Zimbabwe, have quadrupled their enrollments since independence. Teacher training capacity has increased dramatically as have technical training capacities. In 1983 tertiary technical training only took place in Harare and Bulawayo. By the end of the decade, certificate programs existed in six other cities. The university, after doing relatively little in this area during the 1980s, is now moving toward an open university system with more extensive use of distance education, media, and off-campus instruction. BEST also helped expand capacity and raise the status of what is now the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Bulawayo. The development technology unit at NUST was cited in interviews as a particular strength.

The University of Zimbabwe also has transformed and reoriented itself from an elite institution modeled on British universities to one modeled on U.S. institutions with elements of extension, community college, master's degrees

[1] At the time of this study, a report had just been completed but had not yet been cleared or released to the team.

and professional development programs, a teaching farm, and professional journals such as the *Zimbabwe Journal of Education Research*. It also has greatly expanded opportunities for women, who now account for half of the master's candidates and some 35 percent of the students in agriculture sciences. Similar changes are observable at other tertiary institutions such as Belvedere. These changes have more to do with ZIMMAN and ZASA impacts than with BEST, but they also are part of the changes in the culture of tertiary institutions that necessarily accompany the government's commitment to expanding the secondary level thus creating pressures for expanded opportunity at higher levels.

In 1983-84, a typical student could enter university with as little as three or four points out of 15 possible "A"-level points (each of the three "A" levels has a potential of five points). Now, the typical cutoff point is 10 or 11 points, and 13 points or more for the more competitive fields such as law and medicine. There is some affirmative action on the entry scores, with women, older students (women over 25 and men over 30), and the physically handicapped being accepted with a one-point advantage for BA/B.Sc., but not in the professional schools. The University of Zimbabwe receives 11,000 to 15,000 applications annually. Of that number, about 7,000 qualify with at least 10 or 11 points, and of those only 2,500 are accepted.

The Government of Zimbabwe should be congratulated for its heroic effort to extend educational opportunities across the nation. There are, however, some lingering problems. For example, at the primary-school level the drop-out rate is a concern—only about 80 percent of the age group reaches grade 7. Only about 70 percent of all students proceed to the secondary level. Rural and isolated areas have fewer supplies and more untrained teachers, since trained teachers prefer to work in more urban areas. Because there is a substantial internal migration toward urban areas, the pupil-teacher ratio in urban areas often is 45 or 50 to one. Achievement rates, measured by examination scores, rose initially after independence but declined markedly in math and English; median scores have remained fairly constant over the past decade. On the other hand, the University of Zimbabwe admission standards have improved substantially, and there are many more qualified applicants than positions.

It appears that two school systems continue to be in effect, one relatively advantaged and high performing and one less well staffed, more crowded, and lower in achievement scores. However, the duality is no longer mainly on racial lines (though European children are mostly in the better schools), and both good and poor schools are now spread geographically throughout the country.

The team did not get a clear sense of Zimbabwean priorities for further reform and next steps, in part because of the limited time available to explore the question. The team's general impression was of an apparent absence of coherent macroplanning and associated data gathering and reporting. When asked for relevant reports or studies or long-term planning scenarios, the team got little response other than statistical summaries of current programs and statements of concern about budget constraints and current mismatches between rhetoric and performance.

The team was struck by the apparent lack of a systematic or sustained program for education research focused on improving instructional effectiveness or even exploring the causes of low achievement. The examinations council undertakes, apparently on its own initiative, some analyses of examination results to identify weaknesses and possible explanations. Quantitative studies are conducted to determine teacher qualifications and the availability of materials and other inputs. The Curriculum Development Unit (which the team visited but did not interview at length) appears focused on content, and the workshops (for experimentation and materials development) at the National Education Service Center appeared underutilized. The *Zimbabwe Journal of Education Research* at the Univer-

sity of Zimbabwe continues to publish, with a very modest circulation of about 400 per biennial issue, but these are mostly monographs and individual pieces of research. Zimbabwe participated in a regional study of reading outcomes in 1990, which was mentioned in several interviews, but neither follow-up nor further studies and international comparisons seem to be planned.

An interview with ministry planners revealed that they were aware that employers and parents had a different opinion about what constitutes a quality education and, therefore, want a different output from the schools. However, no interest was expressed in studying such views further, apparently since their planning mandate was focused on the achievement of ministry quantitative objectives and on specifying budgetary and staffing requirements and options for service delivery. Also, the planning unit in the Ministry of Education had been downgraded from a division to a section of a division, which effectively meant that it had neither mandate nor staff, budget nor invite to raise questions about decisions made at higher levels and in other divisions.

Strategic Issues and Choices for Zimbabwe

Quantitative Choices

Perhaps the key policy choice of the early 1980s was to expand the secondary level as rapidly as possible, aiming for nine years of schooling as the standard for all students and for a 70 percent transition rate from the primary level almost immediately. From this decision flowed ZIMTEC, the Zimbabwe Teacher Education program, and ZIMSCI, the Zimbabwe Science Education program, as well as the decision to focus on community school building and rely more on an academic secondary model than a technical/vocational emphasis. It also put qualitative as well as quantitative pressure on the tertiary institutions to expand and diversify. Opportunities for students in rural areas and for women would have to expand rapidly. Teacher training would have to expand, and more technical training would have to be offered at the tertiary level. All of this would have to be accomplished within tight budgets and even tighter time frames.

The tertiary institutions were key both to the financial and staffing feasibility of plans at the other education levels and to the linkages between the overall education and training systems and the changing institutional and marketplace needs of the new Zimbabwe. It was, therefore, important for BEST to include tertiary institutions, even though the program was justified mainly in terms of the expansion and reorientation of primary and secondary education. This was recognized early by analysts such as Mazhero. "In years ahead, whether Zimbabwe succeeds or fails in the education sector will largely depend on what happens at the secondary and post-secondary levels. It is at these levels where the per student costs are highest and the closer ties between education and work exist."

Though much analytic input to conventional planning was lacking, there had been considerable debate well before independence about the policy choices. Key people spent years in Zambia, Tanzania, and elsewhere and were determined not to make the same mistakes with respect to financing, management, and delivery systems. They also were determined to do at least as well as the previous regime in terms of quality and standards. In effect, the standards of the advantaged schools in the previous unequal system became the benchmark for creating standards for the new system. Standards now would be applied without discrimination. There would be compensatory efforts to bring disadvantaged schools up to standard. There could be changes in content and in the patterns of school expansion and training programs, but there would not be compromises on the technical quality or levels, international comparability, or even selectivity.

Some wanted to move fast on a more radical reform of exams and localization. Others, though, experienced situations where quantita-

tive goals had been associated with a precipitous decline in quality and severe management problems. They urged caution, placing higher priority on building confidence in the country's standards, using comparability as a measure of progress for the education reforms. Perhaps fortuitously, Zimbabwe did not have its own staff of examiners and exam development teams, which meant it would have to live with an external examiner for a while. The ministry did move to localize the setting and marking of exams, however, saving millions of dollars in the process. Under BEST, USAID helped provide a building and scanners for processing and marking exams.

The financial database and spreadsheet model helped the new team find affordable ways to increase the rate of expansion without adversely affecting academic standards. For example, many of the schools serving the European and Asian communities were run virtually as country clubs, in some cases with more groundskeepers and maintenance staff than instructional faculty, and nearly all the secondary schools for Africans were boarding schools. Almost all of the new community-built schools would be day schools. By using the staffing ratios and salary scales of the primary schools, an affordable option was found for accelerating secondary education.

Another strategic choice of major consequence for the rate of expansion was the decision not to build more government schools. The new team had some experience devising low-budget, ad hoc education programs in refugee camps and other "bush school" environments, and they had some specific ideas on what they wanted to do with curriculum, teacher training, and other policy-driven education reforms. However, they had little or no experience with construction. USAID and some other donors helped with construction of technical training and teacher training facilities at the tertiary level. Under BEST, buildings were provided for the National Education Service Center, Curriculum Development Unit, examinations council, and other key parts of the infrastructure. The Government of Zimbabwe built very few schools or other education facilities using its own funds. As a result, the central ministry bureaucracy did not grow as fat as in other countries, and Zimbabwe appears not to have had the problems other countries do in terms of contract abuses and corruption in school building.

The government decided communities would be responsible for building all secondary schools. District councils, created the same month this decision was made, provided oversight. The reasons were partly that the government had neither the funds nor the management and contracting expertise to implement a school-building program. However, it also appears to have been a conscious choice, consistent with a spirit of self-sufficiency, to look to the communities to take the initiative and avoid having the government be the provider of everything that was needed. The government was to help with planning and inspection and provide teachers, materials, and other logistical support, but it would not build or manage the schools themselves.

Mazhero summed up the thinking of at least some at the time. "There is no intrinsic reason why the provision of education should be free anymore than provision of medical care. The government should pursue selective policies of educational subsidizing and not 'across-the-board' funding. In its rush to provide 'free education' on an extensive scale, the government not only funds the more affluent segments of the population, but it also turns off the very source of self-help and cooperative effort that are at the heart of self-reliance."

In the few instances where the government did try to provide for the students (such as giving start-up funds to ex-combatants to obtain land and equipment), it proved to be a mistake that led to waste and poor incentives for the beneficiaries. Direct subsidies were abandoned in favor of loan programs, increased technical assistance, and ongoing training.

Many of the new schools were started—often restarted—in abandoned and underutilized

buildings. Others used tents and prefabricated classroom units. In other cases, the students built their own accommodations and classrooms. In some areas, local companies helped with the construction and refurbishment of buildings. Several of the teacher colleges were expanded secondary schools. For example, Morgan ZIMTEC was a boarding school for colored students, and Mutare ZIMTEC was a small Catholic school initially rented then sold to the government.

In any case, primary enrollment had already tripled by the time BEST started, and the highest priorities were to accelerate teacher training and to accommodate the secondary enrollment demand that resulted from the rapid expansion of primary schooling. Communities were building secondary schools faster than the ministry could provide teachers and other support. Expansion went from very limited secondary capacity of any kind for African students in 1980 to about one secondary day school for every five primary schools in 1983 to about one secondary day school for every three primary schools at the end of the decade. In the short term, this overbuilding led to serious problems of providing enough staff and maintaining standards on content. Longer-term problems included demand for maintenance, physical quality improvement, and some underutilization of schools. As populations shifted geographically, some schools grew, and qualitative differences among schools became more acknowledged.

Qualitative Choices

The public demand for rapid primary expansion and universal access was simply accepted without much planning. Children were to be enrolled, somehow; the ministry would find the teachers, somehow; and it was up to the communities, somehow, to find somewhere for the children to be taught. It was hoped that the secondary-level expansion could be planned more rationally and incrementally. The strategy was to use 1981 to make plans, restructure the ministry, and get the primary expansion under way. Then in 1982 a major push would be made for secondary expansion—begin with 177 secondaries and plan to add 400 in 1982 and about 60 per year thereafter. This plan proved impossible to maintain. The combination of the government's unwillingness to oppose public demand for expansion and its inability to restrain communities from building their own schools meant that secondary capacity expanded much faster than predicted or desired. Rather than an expansion of 60 a year, secondary schools continued to be built at the rate of about 400 per year in 1983, 1984, and 1985. By 1984 there were some 1,500 new secondary schools, mostly very small, poorly built, and ill-equipped, and the government faced the enormously difficult task of meeting its commitment to provide teachers, texts, and other materials for the schools. To meet this commitment at the same time that it was expected to reform teaching, revise content, and generate new materials was viewed by external experts and by many in the new government as nearly impossible.

Two decisions helped impose some qualitative discipline on this expansion. The first was the decision to limit sixth-form expansion to 100 schools. Of these, 28 were targeted as technical high schools with technology labs, boarding, and new buildings. Though few restrictions were placed on the expansion through form five, access to form six was an important qualitative as well as quantitative gateway for those aspiring to further education. Sixth form continues to be limited and selective, enrolling in 1996 only about 11,000 out of the 142,000 students completing the secondary level in 1995; virtually all of those in upper secondary aspire to and expect to continue their education at the tertiary level.

A second, related decision was a ministerial decree that threatened to close schools not meeting the minimum standards. Though the threat was not really enforced (and may never have intended to be), the effect was to put some initially very modest standards in place (a minimum number of classrooms, housing for teachers, water, and sanitation) that could be expanded and refined over time. The need to meet such

standards appears to have been one of the factors slowing the expansion from 1985 onward; a slowdown in demand was another.

ZIMSCI and ZIMTEC

Two major innovations helped address the quantitative problems of expansion while enabling qualitative standards to be maintained reasonably well. The first was a decision to shift standard 7 to the primary cycle and to devise a way of teaching science in standard primary schools without labs or other specialized facilities. Since the government managed the primary schools directly, it could take steps to add classrooms and staff as needed. Further, as primary school teachers were on a different salary scale, the costs were lower if the class was switched to the primary level. The major technical innovation was a well-designed metal cupboard equipped with all the materials, including consumables, needed for standard 7 science, accompanied by modular instructional materials and teacher guides. This package, complemented by in-service training for primary teachers using the materials, came to be known as ZIMSCI and has since been replicated in a number of other countries.[2] USAID had no role in developing the initial ZIMSCI approach, which was almost entirely the work of Zimbabwean educators, but BEST resources were used to produce materials and improve some of the modules as part of the ongoing curriculum development work.

[2] The Dean of Science commented that preparation in science continues to be poor and that part of the problem may be the reliance on kits and prepared modules, combined with undertrained teachers. He was apparently talking about preparation of university students, but he also suggested that at all levels it would be better to have better prepared teachers and smaller, more flexible classes in which young scientists can "learn to play with stuff." He thought the best of the schools, including public as well as private examples, are comparable to (or better than) most schools in Europe and the United States, and the equipment and teacher competencies are gradually getting better. However, many of the schools in the countryside are very bad.

The issue of academic standards was raised in many of the interviews, and it is obviously a continuing concern and a dilemma for those who want to support reform and those who want to maintain selectivity. For example, it is understood that science education needs to move in the direction of integrated science, with more attention given to collaboration, exploration, and problem solving and less to rote learning of curriculum for purposes of passing exams. However, some form of objective selection criteria is needed as is some basis for international comparison, both to validate national standards and to ensure that those who wish to study outside the country can qualify to do so. Since close to half of the students completing "A" levels do in fact study outside of Zimbabwe, at least for brief periods of time, this is a significant concern. As a result, the government probably would be receptive to an internationally supported effort to develop new examinations or other assessment instruments consistent with new approaches to integrated, problem-based science and validated regionally and internationally as meeting clearly understood standards and criteria. This probably is the case in other fields as well.

A second innovation, driven by the need to expand teaching staff quickly, was the ZIMTEC program for training teachers. ZIMTEC replaced the previous practice of preservice, postsecondary training for three years, accompanied by some practice teaching. The new approach put apprentice teachers into the classroom as supervised teachers in their second year, and they returned for further training in their third year. Teachers were placed into the classroom more quickly, thereby ensuring that their additional year of formal training was based on some significant practical experience. It also increased the effective capacity of the teacher colleges by a third. An additional benefit was that the practice teaching, which normally took place in schools nearby the teacher colleges, was now occurring in rural schools, too. Supervisors as well as apprentice teachers now have a better grasp of the more typical realities of teaching in

Zimbabwe.

Technical Teacher Training

Belvedere Technical Teacher Training College, built with USAID assistance, contributed to the alleviation of staff shortages and improved the quality of technical training. Belvedere is a good example of a number of the general points made elsewhere in this review. USAID built the school using resources under an earlier CIP, though it is generally considered to be a BEST activity. The physical building is still, 13 years later, well kept and sound, indicating the quality of the initial construction. Belvedere has grown substantially, and it has changed over time as the demands for training in new areas have grown, as the quality of students entering has changed, and as it has responded to critical judgments made in reviews of its programs. Belvedere is one of the few schools from any country known to team members that successfully trains technical teachers through preservice training.

Until 1991-92, the Belvedere curriculum was as follows: the first year consisted of technical training plus education courses; the second year supervised practice teaching; the third year further coursework and practicums at the college; and the fourth year teaching apprenticeships. This teaching apprenticeship pattern was similar to the one used in the ZIMTEC programs. However, the content expertise at Belvedere was weak, which was also probably the case in the ZIMTEC program. Employers considered teachers to be "half baked" in terms of their technical skills and their knowledge of relevant industries and did not believe they could teach effectively as early as the second year. An assessment in 1990 conducted by the Higher Education Examinations Committee, with some technical support on planning and assessment through IIEP, led to recommendations on the rationalization of vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe.

Belvedere has implemented most of the recommendations and has gone beyond them in forming advisory councils and partnerships with targeted industries such as clothing and textiles, hotel and catering, and wood technologies. Students at Belvedere now specialize in a technical field first; education coursework comes later. The students spend eight months employed in the industry in their second year and receive an allowance paid through the Zimbabwe Development Fund (or by the employer in lieu of payments to the fund). Apprenticeship teaching begins in the third year. The program appears to be sufficiently successful in raising the technical skills of prospective teachers, so much so that some are reevaluating their choices and are looking to careers in industry rather than in the schools.

Belvedere's experience of quality improvement is an example of the successful institutionalization of an ongoing consultation, reassessment, and restructuring process. Further, it is one of many examples of effective partnerships among the schools and the relevant private sector. The experience also shows how assessment exercises using research and consultation can drive a reexamination of education policies and models. The Zimbabwe environment appears open to using such assessment and consultation to good effect, but discretionary funding within the public sector in Zimbabwe does not appear to be available for sustaining such assessments. With some exceptions, such as Germany's Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, flexibly programmed external funding like that provided under BEST is no longer available. (The above assessment was not funded under BEST and the restructuring of Belvedere's program was done after USAID support ended.)

Commentary on Strategy Choices

The above decisions made from 1983 through 1985, when BEST was in the planning and early implementation stages, were well conceived and probably would have been adequate to address the quantitative expansion without significant loss of quality at least through 1988 (when the secondary intake of 1984 would begin to complete the mandatory basic-education cycle of nine

years). However, the government overrode the ministry in 1986 and decided to make basic education extend 11 years. This decision was made largely on political grounds. One of the issues in the national election of 1985 was whether access to "O" level education (completion of standard 5) was to be used as a barrier or rationing device for access to tertiary education and other opportunities. Clearly, Zimbabwe could not afford 11 years of basic education, which would greatly stretch available financial, management, and teacher-staffing resources. Yet, equally clearly, Zimbabwe could not have afforded the expansion of 1982–85, and prudent education planners did not recommend that they do so until they had addressed the capacity problems and ensured the sustainability of finance and other support.

So, planning continued to be guided as much by political imperatives and categorical decisions as by education-planning expertise and targeted resource allocations. Predictably, this led to another difficult period of implementation and some chaos and criticism, but it also led to the situation today where essentially all Zimbabweans who wish to continue through the "O" levels have the opportunity to do so. Further, though quality as measured by pass rates and scores is not nearly as high or as consistent as desirable, it does not appear to have gone down. Of some 250,000 students now taking the "O" levels annually, about one-third are reported to obtain five passes, another third one to four passes, and the rest fail everything. At the low end of this performance, there are obvious reasons for concern. However, the major political and public-policy problem is that only about 14,000 new places are available annually for students wishing to continue their education at the tertiary level.

Though educated unemployment is a concern, some interviewees did not view this entirely as a problem. One suggested that the surplus may be good. If students are well trained, they will find their way and open up new fields and opportunities. Another suggested that the training was in some cases better than working conditions (for example, nursing) and that rather than reduce the numbers trained, the emphasis should be on improving working conditions and raising standards in the relevant industries. A third interviewee suggested that there was inadequate support for ongoing research, technological change, and new initiatives in the employing sectors. If the employers are only staffing in slowly changing industries whose technology is current, it is likely that there will continue to be a shortage of some skills as well as a significant surplus of applicants. If the workplace is in fact adaptable and changing, then well-educated personnel should be able to adjust and learn new approaches.

As an aside, it was remarkable that none of the people interviewed talked about the changing technology environment and how that might affect either the demand for educated, adaptable workers and workers with information-technology skills, or the demand for new education approaches and emphases. The need for such a dialogue seemed obvious to the team members. Undoubtedly, some people are concerned about these changes, yet this topic did not figure prominently in any of the interviews with some 40 people. Rather, when pressed on technical skill priorities, agriculture skills, accountancy and related business skills, engineering, and skilled professions such as nursing were mentioned.

Strategic Issues and Choices for USAID

USAID Objectives and Investment Priorities

As of 1983, agencywide USAID priorities included policy reform and government restructuring; reliance on the private sector and market mechanisms; institutional development; and technology transfer. In addition, USAID/Zimbabwe, which had grown rapidly as a new mission, was under some pressure to demonstrate that a $75 million portfolio could be managed by six direct-hire staff. Thus, independent of the specifics of

the education-sector requirements, an NPA approach was attractive, particularly if it supported policy reform, institutional development, market mechanisms, technical training, and technical innovations. Other advantages of the approach included the prominent roles given the private sector and communities and the fact that USAID did not need to directly manage the implementation.

The strategy implicit in the distribution of BEST funds and other USAID sector support had several objectives that included the following:

- Improve the quality and quantity of instructors through participant training, staff development, and construction of technical and teacher colleges.
- Expand the education sector's capacity to produce better-qualified entrants into the workforce through the construction of technical colleges and universities.
- Improve the quality of workforce entrants through more appropriate curriculum related to tertiary-level skills.
- Improve the quality of primary- and secondary-level foundation skills through the development and distribution of technical equipment and kits.
- Improve the capacity of the educational system's managers to plan and manage the education system through computerization of selected managerial functions, participant training, and staff development.

Distribution by level of schooling

1. **Postsecondary institutional support (MOHE/MOE) — Z$36.2 million**

Construction	59 percent
Operational experts	39 percent
Equipment	1 percent
Staff development	1 percent

2. **Primary and Secondary Education — Z$28.4 million**

Construction	30 percent
Equipment	33.4 percent
Learning resources	31 percent
Staff development	5 percent

3. **Participant training — Z$.9 million**

Not specified	.5 percent

Total — Z$65.5 million

Taken from the final report, the BEST resources (combined foreign and local currency value of US$45 million or Z$65 million) were distributed as indicated on the charts below and at right.

Category	Amount	Percent
Construction	Z$29.8 million	44
Operational experts	$14.0	21
Equipment	$10.0	15
Learning resources	$ 8.8	13
Staff development	$ 3 .0	5
Contractor fee	$ 2.0	3
Total	**Z$67.6 million**	**101**

From 1985 to 1988, BEST provided approximately 25 percent of the Government of Zimbabwe's capital budget for education. BEST foreign currency resources totaled US$15.4 million. Of that amount, 68 percent went toward technical-assistance support, primarily operational experts (OPEX) at the Harare Institute of Technology, Bulawayo Polytechnic (now the National University of Science and Technology), and the University of Zimbabwe. Some 26 percent went toward commodities, including mini-

and micro-computers, software, and equipment for the examinations branch. Training took up 6 percent and went toward four long-term training initiatives and provided short-term training in the United States for 70 participants. The local currency portion totaled Z$45 million. Of that amount, 61 percent was spent on construction at Belvedere Technical Teachers College, Mutare Technical College, Masvingo Technical College, and Harare Institute of Technology. Commodities, which included educational materials and technical kits, took up 27 percent of the local currency portion, and 1 percent went toward staff training and technical assistance.

Due to reallocation through the CIP mechanism, the local currency portion of BEST also 1) provided the Zimbabwean private sector with access to scarce foreign currency; 2) helped jump-start the economy by providing access to spare parts and other commodities that were limited by sanctions and foreign-exchange restrictions; and 3) helped reinforce the reliance on the private sector and on market mechanisms (e.g., the foreign-exchange auction) as the basis for economic policy. BEST CIP funding generated over Z$45 million for the education sector, and the private sector used all but US$200,000.

USAID Modalities and Implementation Choices

Aside from the unavoidable technical debates about sectoral strategy, subsector priorities, and the appropriateness and feasibility of various quantitative objectives, a number of USAID strategic decisions on modalities helped shape the overall effort, including decisions by the respective ministries. The most important decisions appear to have been CIP disbursements for 80 percent of the funds; host-country contracting; and a decision to proceed on the strength of the agreed-upon objectives.

CIP Disbursement for 80 Percent of Funds

This reinforced important economic policy-reform goals with respect to setting the currency exchange price at auction and ensuring funds went to the private sector. It also brought the Ministry of Finance directly into the process of providing funds for education-sector activities. This in turn helped ensure that 1) the Ministry of Finance would play a fiduciary role in allocation of funds; 2) the funds would in fact be allocated to education-sector uses; and 3) the assumptions underlying BEST regarding the budgetary priority for education would be respected.

Though USAID was concerned about having enough transparency in the decision-making and allocation process so it could use the conditionality of the NPA approach, it appears that similar concerns operated within the Government of Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Finance was supportive of making education a high priority, but it needed to be reassured that its emphasis would yield results. The ministry hosted the interministerial BEST Working Group and could see that the allocations were being made on the basis of a clearly thought-out strategy and serious purpose (though not always with the analytical detail that some wanted). The fact that the decisions were also consistent with long-range investment objectives of the respective ministries and the Public Sector Investment Program helped reinforce the commitment to maintain the budget priority. It is not possible to prove causality, but Zimbabwe did maintain an unusually high budget priority for education, technical training , and higher education throughout the decade, even during difficult economic periods. Today it continues to have one of the highest public budget investment priorities of any country in the world, with 20 percent of the budget earmarked for schools and another 6 percent for higher education.

Host-Country Contracting

BEST was one of the first major programs to use host-country contracting procedures. The decision to use a host-country contract helped both to institutionalize specific management practices and to reinforce the fact that USAID con-

sidered the BEST assistance package to be Zimbabwe's to allocate as it saw fit.

This was one of the first experiences with external contracting for the new ministry. Since the government treated the resources as allocable, host-country contracting appears to have helped Zimbabwe ask hard questions about what it really needed. In some cases it was concluded that no assistance was needed. Had the contracting been done more conventionally, there likely would have been a strong incentive to top up the requests and seek all the assistance available. Knowing that any funds saved from one area would be available for other uses led to a very disciplined approach to program design.

For example, decision-makers were reluctant to hire external experts and to use funds for external training. When external experts were needed, they were not employed as advisors to technical assistance personnel but as operational personnel assigned to positions in government institutions, to fill university faculty positions, and otherwise used as operational-expert personnel. The receiving institution had no incentive to use OPEX personnel other than filling an opening for a scarce skill. OPEX personnel received the same salary a Zimbabwean citizen would have received for the position, along with housing and other normal emoluments. Though they had their salary topped up for the costs required to recruit the candidates, none of the hosting institutions received any additional funds.

This arrangement appears to have caused a number of misunderstandings and contract disputes while the contract was in place. The contractor, and many of the OPEX personnel, considered the positions to be technical assistance in nature and looked for counterparts and opportunities to provide advice. Zimbabwean supervisors considered these hires more or less the same as other appointed personnel, albeit personnel with particular expertise. Though the distinction was clear at the beginning, it appears to have gotten blurred by the time of the mid-program evaluation, at which time the effectiveness of OPEX personnel was being assessed by USAID in terms of mentoring counterparts and other impacts, something that does not appear to have been intended or expected on the Zimbabwe side. In the meantime, relatively few "counterparts" were sent for training, though Zimbabwe had sent many other staff for training under the ZIMMAN program and with other funds.

A Decision to Proceed on the Strength of the Agreed-Upon Objectives

USAID and the Government of Zimbabwe had no major disagreements at the policy-objectives level, though in many areas there was deep skepticism about feasibility and a shared awareness that some aspects might not work as planned. The PAAD is unusually candid about many of the expected problems. USAID was aware of the probable slowing of the economy and the likelihood of budget cutbacks, and it expected that problems of surplus school-leavers would begin to show up by 1988. Yet it elected to approve the PAAD and proceed anyway. As the PAAD stated, "The most difficult period of our policy dialogue lies ahead. These discussions will make a clear distinction between educational policy goals and objectives and the mechanisms and cost implications of attaining them. USAID's role is to assist in evaluating and altering the mechanisms, not to argue with the underlying objectives and goals. This separation is critical to the success of our policy dialogue."

Several of those interviewed remarked that USAID's willingness to proceed despite being aware of serious problems regarding implementation was important because it gave the new teams confidence to tackle the problems. Zimbabwe did attempt some reforms that were larger and more aggressive than any country had previously attempted, and over the next decade, in spite of problems, it accomplished most of what it set out to do.

BEST Impacts and Implementation Lessons

Capacity Building under BEST

BEST activities helped make possible the rapid expansion of secondary and tertiary education, and it improved the delivery of primary education. However, it is not realistic to claim that BEST alone was responsible for qualitative or quantitative increases in education. BEST's basic roles were to promote innovation in curricula and learning resources, to improve the management of the education system, to localize examinations, to train teachers, and to provide general budgetary support for infrastructure development. The following areas are those in which BEST clearly had an impact.

Expanded Teacher-Training Capacities

Prior to independence, only one teacher education college prepared teachers at the African schools for secondary-level instruction, and only two teacher training colleges prepared primary-level instructors. Since independence, more than 40,000 teachers have graduated from teacher education colleges in Zimbabwe. More than 25 percent of all secondary teachers attended Belvedere Technical Teachers College, a recipient of USAID construction and equipment funds. BEST resources also were used to improve the training, utilization, and motivation of teachers and other education staff, including technicians, analysts, and supervisors in regional and district education centers, computer centers, examinations branches, and curriculum units. In sum, BEST contributed appreciably to the government's efforts to increase the number of qualified teachers, improve the ability of teachers to deliver technically competent training, and improve the utilization of other personnel essential to the improvement of education in Zimbabwe.

Sustaining the Curriculum and Learning Innovations

USAID sector assistance, under BEST with funding from the previous CIP, provided support for the construction of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), secondary-school technical kits, and distance-learning materials. The kits were produced and distributed to more than 660 schools in rural and urban areas in an effort to counter the academic bias of the curriculum and provide basic skills for employment. The distance-learning project provided materials to minimally qualified teachers at the primary and secondary levels. ZIMSCI, an additional USAID–supported curriculum project, provided simple, cost-effective laboratory kits and teacher-student manuals to poorly equipped schools.

All these activities moved the curriculum materials much closer to Zimbabwe's sociocultural context. The projects made minimally qualified teachers more effective and gave many more schools some basic, usable texts and materials where they would otherwise have had little or none. Finally, the materials made the curriculum more relevant to the work world and provided a more hands-on approach that better equipped students with some of the skills necessary for employment.

It was not possible to make an in-depth assessment of the long-term impact of these approaches. The ZIMSCI approach continues to be used, although the technology kits have not continued. Although the CDU still exists, the National Education Service Center facility appeared to be underutilized, with a modest library of somewhat outdated materials (reflecting an inadequate acquisitions budget) and unused workshops. Several of those interviewed felt CDU's academic bias prevented it from making progress on integrating more practical vocational training into the overall curricula.

Distance learning and the use of media in education generally appear to have caught on slower than expected during the 1980s. Now these approaches seem to be getting some attention both at the university level and the secondary level, including follow-on adult education and skills training programs. However, the team got the impression that this work is relatively conventional and conducted

without much of a research base. For example, there is no active effort to survey consumer demand for such training.

Several interviewees agreed with the team's general sense that the spirit of innovation prevalent in the 1980s has dampened as the educational system expanded and developed better management systems. Activities started earlier as innovations have now become mainstream, the funding for discretionary expenditures for new initiatives has dried up, and some of the innovative units have been marginalized. (Some of the comments dealt more with the pride of being able to consolidate the successes, improve the quality, and sustain the programs, rather than regret that more innovations were not under way.)

Planning and Administrative Capacity

Given the rapid success during the first years of independence, it might be assumed that the education sector had sufficient planning and administrative capacity. It did not, and most interviewed recalled a period of ad-hoc decision-making, strong personalities, and some good luck in accomplishing things in spite of the obstacles. Surprisingly little use was made of BEST resources to address staff development within the ministry itself (only 5 percent of the funds). However, a number of other activities indirectly strengthened administrative and planning capabilities. Those included localization of examinations; installation of a computerized management information system; creation of a decentralized system for distributing the technical kits that still functions well today; the development of the Human Resources Research Center; and training of selected individuals at the University of Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Education appears to be relatively well run, though it is thinly staffed and has some serious weaknesses (particularly in the planning and research capacities).

Examinations Capacities

Perhaps the most lasting impact of efforts to strengthen capacity can be seen in the Examinations Branch (now the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council, ZIMSEC). Though examinations reform per se was not one of the stated objectives of BEST, alignment of the examinations with the curriculum changes was a practical necessity, and localization of exam administration and scoring was one of the early options identified for significant cost savings. BEST financed the building where the examinations council is now located, the acquisition of scanners and computer hardware to mark the exams, and some technical assistance through the CDU. Using BEST resources, the Examinations Branch developed an excellent system of management and staff training and now handles more than 700,000 examinations annually. The investment greatly reduced the dependence on the external Cambridge Examinations Syndicate (saving several million dollars annually) and improved the relevance of the curricula and syllabi. ZIMSEC is now solvent on a fee-paying basis and has a contract for administering the standard 7 exam. It would be in a comfortable position to provide other technical services if it could collect the Z$20 million to Z$25 million of arrears that the government owes. Also, since it is now independent, it no longer receives much help from either the ministry or from assistance agencies and has to use its own funds for research on the factors that contribute to examinations results.

Though the USAID assistance to what is now ZIMSEC was an excellent investment and one of the lasting reforms, it probably could have been more influential had there been support for examinations reform and restructuring, rather than just administrative reforms and alignment of the exams with the new curriculum. When it became independent, the examinations board initially acted as a post office for overseas exams, particularly the Cambridge "O" and "A" levels. ZIMSEC now sets its own "O" levels and "A" levels for Cambridge in Ndebele and Shona but continues to use other Cambridge "A" certificates. As it became clear that a lot of content was irrelevant, exams reform began to be

coordinated with curriculum reform (no more writing about daffodils and snowy days), but the testing approach, timing, and structure remained the same. The examinations continue to be very "curriculum-bound," and some interviewed suggested that more research and experimentation is needed to improve exams used in the workplace and to create assessment tools that reflect an emphasis on problem-based learning, criterion-referenced testing, and authentic assessments of skills.

Tertiary Capacities

At the tertiary level, the impact on management capacity was complicated by the creation in 1989 of a new Ministry of Higher Education, which shifted the planning office of the Ministry of Education and some of the Ministry of Labor and Manpower Planning to the new ministry. BEST support for tertiary-capacity improvement was done primarily through building infrastructure (both teaching and administrative structures and dormitories/hostels) and through staff development (a combination of BEST, ZASA, and ZIMMAN funding supported some 400 of the 500 University of Zimbabwe faculty that received external training over the decade).

One of the innovations BEST supported that continues to this day is the Human Resources Research Center (HRRC) at the University of Zimbabwe. The HRRC was designed to provide training, research, and consulting services to the university staff and appears to have done this well in the initial years when it had BEST support. In recent years recurrent budget problems have limited its effectiveness down to two items: the publication of an education-research journal (perhaps the best in Africa) and computer training for researchers. The HRRC appears to have played a useful role, and there seems to be demand for more staff-development support through the HRRC. However, it now appears that HRRC is seriously underbudgeted and somewhat marginalized with staff doing the best they can with antiquated equipment and limited acquisitions. The old computers with USAID logos are sad reminders of what could be accomplished with relatively modest continuing resources to help faculty stay current and linked to their respective professional worlds.

Most of the 400 people USAID trained, primarily at the master's level, have stayed at the university, and many have since obtained advanced degrees. People throughout the university and the bureaucracy were exceptionally positive about the role USAID funds played in overcoming the staff shortage and in raising the technical capacities of key institutions, enabling the overall system to maintain quality as it expanded. The main critical comments heard were that this process has come to an end, with only a few continuing institutional links and without the continuing collegiality and mentoring of long-term professional relationships.

Funding and Allocating Mechanisms under BEST

Foreign Exchange

In 1983 USAID determined that Zimbabwe's foremost need was for foreign exchange with which to implement reforms and support private-sector growth. The Mission judged that Zimbabwe had the capacity to manage its reform program and that it had a well-formulated plan for the expansion and reform of the education sector. USAID provided local currency generated by a commodity import program to finance the expansion and reform. In effect, USAID provided the Government of Zimbabwe with U.S. dollars that were sold to the Zimbabwean private sector, and the local currency generated was then earmarked for the education sector. The program design had multiple effects, including: 1) providing needed foreign exchange to the private sector and easing the adverse impact of foreign-exchange shortages; 2) providing local currency for construction and other infrastructure needs of the education sector; and 3) creating a substantial funding source that the Ministry of Finance was responsible for allocating, thus forcing consultation and coordination across ministries, which helped make decisions more

transparent and improved the coordination and monitoring of project activities.

BEST Working Group

Implementation of the BEST program was coordinated through the interministerial BEST Working Group that was the focal point for BEST planning and decision-making. Members of the working group included representatives of USAID, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Manpower Planning and Development, and the Ministry of Construction. When the Ministry of Higher Education was created it became a member of the working group. The group decided how the local currency generated by the CIP would be allocated and coordinated among participating ministries. To guide its actions, the working group developed and applied a set of criteria for funding proposals from the implementing agencies. The proposals were aimed at specific actions to overcome key constraints to reforming the education sector. In general, the projects had previously been approved conditionally (i.e., subject to funds available) within their respective operating units and were fully developed only after program approval to facilitate the speed of implementation. The working group also considered how the foreign currency portion of BEST would be used so that the programming and outcomes of the two funding streams would be coordinated. This included the funding for external technical assistance and for external training.

USAID did not create this process but did respect and support it and help it mature. The Ministry of Finance's coordination reflected the standard practice of GOZ budgeting, in which activities were conditionally approved and then subject to available financing and further approval. Infrastructure and major projects in other ministries were coordinated in the same way within the overall structure of the Public Sector Investment Program. The BEST Working Group operated somewhat differently in that five ministries were involved, and external funders such as USAID participated directly in the review and advisory processes. Also, BEST funding accounted for a larger percentage of ministry funding than other areas, making the allocation process very central to the ministry's planning and policymaking.

Virtually all people interviewed spoke favorably about the collegiality and positive effects of this process, though some comments had more to do with personalities and specific mistakes (e.g., a failure of coordination meant that a technical college was built without workshops) than with the process or the mechanism itself. In most instances, USAID staff is remembered for helping facilitate but not direct the BEST programs. One example to the contrary was recalled—USAID moved independently of the BEST Working Group to help build and implement Belvedere Technical Teacher Training College, which was actually outside of BEST parameters in terms of funding but was part of BEST in terms of the ministry's planning perspective.

In addition to the US$45 million in BEST funding, USAID also provided the Zimbabwe government with US$13 million in training through the ZIMMAN I project, which included support for university capacity development and teacher training. By operating simultaneously with BEST, though not subject to the same interministerial negotiation, ZIMMAN I provided USAID and the Government of Zimbabwe with an unusual degree of funding and operational flexibility.

Impressions of the Coordination Mechanism

First, extra budgetary funding may be essential for extraordinary coordination processes to work. When the necessity of allocating extra budgetary funds ended with the phasing out of BEST, the ministries no longer saw a need to subject their programs to review by other operational ministries, and the working group no longer functioned as such. Second, because the funder did not assign categories to intended ex-

penditures, some potential programs were overlooked and others were implemented inefficiently or slowly. The key, in the opinion of one of those who participated in the allocations, was whether funds were earmarked (at least notionally) by subfunction. Where funds were not earmarked but were considered on a case-by-case basis—as with European Union funding and some other donors, such as the Canadian International Development Agency—anybody could make a claim since "anything is education." On the other hand, entities such as ZIMSEC, which were integral to the process but did not fall under the ministry's budget, tended to be left out. Much in-fighting and jealousy could have been avoided with some level of matching requirement and/or longer-term budgetary commitments beyond the period of the project.

There may also be a more prosaic explanation for this financing approach and a more interesting aspect to the collaboration and invention of new ways of making allocation decisions. Method recalls that at the completion of the initial BEST design process there appeared to be agreement on the major expenditure categories. However, nowhere near the US$45 million of hard currency requirements were allocated due to the Zimbabwe planners' careful elimination of tasks that did not require external technical assistants or personnel and the effective steps Zimbabwe had taken to become self-sufficient under the sanctions.

Those who kept things going under sanctions had developed a "can-do" attitude and a culture of self-sufficiency, and many of those new leaders most committed to radical social change had learned how to accomplish much with little resources. Those leaders believed more in the ability of people to mobilize and accomplish things by themselves than in the ability of the government (and the still-suspect commercial sector) to provide services to the people. Caught in the middle were those who had recently arrived with the assistance agencies and those newly returned from exile who did not have the experience of the self-sufficiency culture and who thought more in terms of programs to be delivered. Thus, USAID had no option other than to provide the hard currency directly to the Ministry of Finance in support of preidentified expenditures requiring substantial hard currency. And many in the new government—both the conservatives worried about profligate spending, the creation of new parastatals, and entitlements, and the radicals committed to shifting power and achieving social objectives as rapidly as possible—found themselves supporting an approach that made disbursements quickly and then monitored activities for budgetary impact and put them under local control for strategic allocation. This was, to say the least, a unique partnership that appears to have surprised many at the time, and 15 years later it is still being remarked upon by those who participated in the process.

The team's current impression is that a culture of fiduciary responsibility and pride in self-sufficiency generally continues in the education sector in Zimbabwe. Though macroeconomic problems and signs of conspicuous consumption are issues in present-day Zimbabwe, the education sector commands an extraordinarily high budget while also relying substantially on parents, communities, and employers to help finance education. The team noted a number of areas where under-expenditure appears to be an issue (e.g., materials acquisition, research and assessment, ongoing staff training, and education technology) and some areas where ineffective expenditure may be the issue (e.g., preemployment technical training and the emphasis on getting credentials for teachers). However, the dominant impression was of well-maintained buildings, staff who were serious and on-task, and little evidence of wasteful or extravagant spending.

Summary

What Did BEST Do That Was Different?

From the perspective of nearly 15 years after its inception, some aspects of BEST may

seem passé, and a reader who has incorporated lessons learned into his or her current thinking may have difficulty seeing much different in BEST. In fact, a number of things set BEST apart from the normal USAID project of that era. Some of those differences include the following:

Use of CIP: Although USAID had used local currency and CIP-generated currency before BEST, it was one of the first programs to use this mechanism to provide education-sector support. Moreover, BEST was one of the first efforts to combine CIP-generated local currency and foreign exchange to support the education sector.

Nonproject assistance approach: Five years after BEST, USAID/Washington promoted the use of a nonproject assistance approach in many of its sector programs. In essence, NPA is a development assistance model that attempts to reinforce good policy choices by providing funds to countries with well-formulated policies and plans to carry out programs subject to an agreed-upon set of benchmark results. This differs from other development models that provide funding for specific projects regardless of the policy framework or management capacity in a country. BEST was an early NPA project, or at least a forerunner of the NPA approach, insofar as USAID supported Zimbabwe's policies and judged it to have well-formulated plans and the management capacity to carry out the program.

Decision-making process: The degree to which the BEST Working Group made the decisions, rather than having USAID or other contractors dictate those decisions, was unusual for most USAID programs at the time or since. Zimbabwe's need for fast, flexible programming of resources required USAID to work constructively within a policy environment and sensitively within local decision-making processes. The BEST administrative process enabled it to do so. In most cases, USAID's standard operating procedures require more decision-making in advance of funding commitments and more micromanagement during implementation.

Empowerment: The decision-making process employed in the BEST project empowered Zimbabwe's decision-makers, and that process contributed to democratization in Zimbabwe. USAID acted as a facilitator rather than a directive donor, and this forced Zimbabwean officials to learn how to collaborate and carry out their own assessments. USAID staff is remembered by nearly all those associated with the project for their insistence on documenting decisions and for their helpful, collegial manner. Some of those interviewed commented that at the time they thought USAID made things unnecessarily difficult and that it would have been easier to make decisions in a way that was more familiar—the donor telling them what it was willing to support. However, over time they felt this experience was useful and strengthened their own work habits. If we are to judge from the fondness with which working group participants recall the BEST administrative structure, then this aspect was a roaring success.

Flexibility and capacity building: The BEST Working Group was the key instrument in project development and in the approval process. It made decisions regarding the allocation of funds, applied criteria for project approval, and enforced requirements for proposals. The group also served a training function by demonstrating effective administrative practices (a point emphasized by many individuals interviewed) and the importance of interministerial coordination. Moreover, the projects implemented under BEST used Government of Zimbabwe standards not USAID standards—standards that in some cases were more demanding.

Factors Critical to Overall Success

Policy context: Taking advantage of the energy and dynamic nature of post-independence Zimbabwe, both the GOZ and USAID made major reform possible at extraordinary speed. It was of great help that Zimbabwe officials had already identified categorical objectives and made a number of de facto decisions based on

events, inherited models, and the experience of key decision-makers prior to independence.

Program coordination: Funds were allocated within the Government of Zimbabwe using a consultative process involving multiple ministries, which forced coordination, joint planning, and assessment across operational boundaries. This helped improve the government's procedures for allocating other types of funding. However, the complexities of joint planning and coordination across multiple ministries was also a limiting factor, given the different leadership and operational environments of the Ministry of Manpower Development and Planning and the Ministry of Education and Culture, and further complicated when the Ministry of Education and Culture split into two ministries.

Program financing: USAID program assistance was large enough to have an impact yet reasonably flexible in regard to end uses. The Government of Zimbabwe gave education an unusually high budgetary and operational priority and has sustained this priority since the early 1980s.

Long-term training and staff development: USAID provided significant training opportunities that were sustained over the course of a decade. The training was managed in part as a separate project but was closely coordinated with BEST program objectives for capacity building.

Factors Limiting Success

Lack of long-term support for "soft-finance" activities: No mechanism was established for ongoing government or external funding of activities such as research, periodic reassessments, external demand studies, planning for projects outside the formal school system, and tertiary training institutions.

Erosion of innovative climate as Zimbabwe's planning and management grew progressively more prudent: As the professional competencies improved and attention to issues of sustainability, management, and predictability of results took center stage, aggressive initiatives and the bold leadership that characterized the first half of the 1980s seemed to erode.

Slower-than-expected economic growth and consequent job creation: Though BEST did assume there would be shortfalls and difficulties in the economic arena before education reforms could have their full impact, Zimbabwe experienced more problems than anticipated due to macroeconomic policies, periods of severe drought, and regional political and economic events.

Lack of follow-on assistance: USAID brought BEST support to an end on an "out is out" basis without a follow-on strategy or complementary program, such as institutional and professional linkages, technical cooperation activities, or ongoing assessment and information exchanges. Most other donors phased out or phased down education sector assistance in Zimbabwe at about the same time.

Differences from General Policy and Strategy Guidance

Sector reform vs. strategies targeted at primary education: Zimbabwe's basic education reform and USAID assistance through BEST, though committed to universal basic education beginning with primary education, mainly focused on expanding access and maintaining quality at the secondary level (and to some extent technical training and tertiary education). Few of the BEST resources were actually spent on the primary level. This experience contrasts with current international emphases on improving primary education quality, distribution, and equity by targeting assistance at the primary level.

Bricks and mortar, commodities, and leveraging: In Zimbabwe, BEST's building assistance, including noninstructional infrastructure such as offices and university dormitories, was in many ways critical to the program's overall impact and to its sustainability. Further, funding for commodities, including instructional materials and toolkits, was critical to early policy reforms. Given the relatively strong currency and the self-sufficiency of the Zimbabwe private sec-

tor, most of these expenditures were made in local currency generated by the CIP disbursements. In contrast, the general guidance is to limit assistance for such end uses and to use hard currency inputs to leverage local currency budgetary commitments.

Fees and subsidies: Rather than reduce fees and increase subsidies to improve equity, Zimbabwe reduced subsidies and increased cost recovery to make it feasible to expand rapidly. The government relied extensively on communities to build and maintain schools, used school fees at all levels, required tuition at tertiary levels, offered student loans to cover boarding and other costs, and looked to employers to fund much of the technical training.

Sustainability and policy reform: Though BEST supported extraordinarily ambitious reforms necessitated by policy decisions of a political nature made in the post-independence period, Zimbabwe has in fact sustained these reforms for more than a decade and shows every sign of continuing to make education a priority. Zimbabwe's experience is that policy-driven reforms taken as political imperatives can force administrative, budgetary, policy, and technical reforms and reallocations that may not otherwise have been possible or advisable using conventional planning approaches. This experience runs counter to international recommendations to plan for impact and sustainability, emphasize provisions for long-term financing, assess implementation requirements carefully, be attentive to cost-effectiveness and efficiency criteria, and agree upon a strategy for capacity building to address any deficits prior to authorization.

Suggestions for Follow-Up and Further Discussion

There is a need for the following:

- Education research, particularly thematic research that is linked to outcomes and sustained over time, complemented with follow-on training and professional support for education researchers and data-system managers.
- Public information or customer research such as surveys and forums to assess parent, community, and employer priorities and levels of satisfaction with available education and training.
- Examinations development, particularly for internationally comparable assessment instruments compatible with integrated science and other curriculum reforms.
- Information technology in the secondary and technical schools, and technology upgrades, such as multimedia computers, LAN servers, and Internet connectivity, at the Human Resources Center and other parts of the University of Zimbabwe, at the Curriculum Development Unit and other divisions of the National Education Service Center, and at ZIMSEC.
- Distance education technology applications, including radio and telecommunications linkages to the university's distance education centers.
- Technical training in information technologies and teaching skills that are required in emerging industries. Priority should be given to areas that would increase global market access and external trade (e.g., packaging and processing, freight handling and forwarding, banking and insurance, telecommunications, travel and travel services, hotels, and other hospitality industries).
- Tertiary linkages concentrating in technical fields, and including alternative institutional and organizational approaches like those at U.S. community colleges and other associate degree programs that are closely linked to specific industries.

APPENDIX 1

BEST Retrospective Study Team

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